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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 001325

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN
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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Ataev and Norov Remarks Reflect Concerns About
Russia and Regional Security

REF: TASHKENT 1257; TASHKENT 903

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, State, Pol-Econ;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The first set of astonishingly high-level meetings between the Government of Uzbekistan and two representatives from the Center for Strategic and International Studies kicked off on July 27 with meetings between them and National Security Council Secretary Ataev, NSC First Deputy Secretary Rakhmankulov, and Foreign Minister Norov. Discussions with the GOU yielded many revealing GOU comments on Russia, regional stability, and the Northern Distribution Network. Intense distrust of Russia was a common theme in their remarks, with these officials accusing Russia of using the threats of terrorism and narcotics as a pretext to justify its presence in the region as well as to create structures like the Rapid Reaction Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Ataev opined that a Rafsanjani regime in Iran would be easier to work with, and he noted that few terrorists are returning to Central Asia at the moment. He highlighted trade and economic cooperation as being Uzbekistan's top priority for further bilateral engagement, followed by military-technical cooperation. Transportation of lethal materials across Uzbekistan's territory does not appear to be currently possible in light of GOU concerns about this raising Uzbekistan's profile for terrorists. It is interesting that the GOU has granted such high-level meetings to representatives of a U.S. think tank-Uzbekistan's "think tanks" are actually directly connected to the GOU and perhaps the GOU is mirror imaging-and we plan to report on their additional meetings with other officials septel. End summary.

Meeting with Ataev and Rakhmankulov

¶2. (C) On July 27, Charge d'Affaires and two representatives of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Andrew Kuchins and Thomas Sanderson) met with National Security Council (NSC) Secretary Murat Ataev and NSC First Deputy Secretary Mir-Akbar Rakhmankulov at the luxurious Dom Priyomov. (Note: Rakhmankulov

also serves as the Director of the Institute for Strategic and Inter-Regional Studies Under the President of Uzbekistan. End note.) Ataev and Rakhmankulov welcomed the Obama Administration's outreach, indicating that Uzbekistan is ready to renew a relationship with the United States based on equal partnership. They expressed their satisfaction with bilateral military cooperation and cooperation on the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) in support of Coalition efforts in Afghanistan.

Withering Criticism of Russia

¶3. (C) Ataev and Rakhmankulov heaped abuse on Russia, with Ataev asserting that Russian "hawks" want the international community to be bogged down in Afghanistan. He accused a large group of siloviki of harboring imperial thoughts and of living in the past. Members of the FSB and SVR do not want to see improvements in Central Asia or Afghanistan, he continued.

¶4. (C) Rakhmankulov agreed, noting that Russia is not interested in resolving the problems in Afghanistan in the near future because war helps to justify Russia's continued presence in the region. "The Russians seek to control the region and its mineral

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resources," he said. Stabilization of Afghanistan would allow a southern route for Central Asia to world markets, which would undermine Russia's position and control. Russia's expressed concerns about the rise of terrorism and narcotics is only a false front intended for the consumption of "ordinary people." In reality, the Russian power structures do not care about the effects of drugs, he continued. The struggle against terrorism and narcotics is only a pretext for Russia's establishment of regional bodies like the Rapid Reaction Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to maintain Russian regional influence and "hem in" Central Asia. Russia's technology is obsolete, its finances are deficient, and Moscow is unable to propose viable solutions to the region's problems. Russia has contributed to regional tensions over water. Furthermore, when countries in the region do not subscribe to Russia's views, the Russians create problems "like the events in May 2009," he added. (Note: This is a reference to the terrorist attacks against a border post in Khonobod and suicide bombing against a police station in Andijon this May. End note.)

Views of Iran

¶5. (C) Turning to Iran, Ataev and Rakhmankulov called Iran "coy," and noted that it would be complicated, though still important, to include Iran in President Karimov's proposed "6 plus 3" plan for Afghanistan. Ataev stated that Khomeini is ill and anti-Presidential sentiments are on the rise in Iran. He noted that despite the nuclear issue, the U.S. has experience working with Iran and it would be possible for the U.S. to do so again. Humanitarian and non-military deliveries to the country would be a good start, and this could eventually lead to discussions of possible Iranian assistance in solving Afghanistan's problems. Ataev warned that the Iranians will still push to develop nuclear weapons with Russian assistance as well as via cooperation with North Korea. Iran's relations with Pakistan, however, are relatively poor, and he noted divisions in Islam between Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iran. Ataev opined that a Rafsanjani regime in Iran would be "easier to work with."

Few Terrorists Returning to Central Asia

16. (C) In response to a CSIS question about whether militants appear to be moving north toward Central Asia, Ataev said that air operations have driven the Taliban out of some regions in Pakistan. While Pashtun tribes have refused shelter to the Taliban, Uighurs, Tajiks, and Uzbeks there, the GOU has not seen many terrorists returning to Tajikistan or to other parts of Central Asia. Ataev said that the events in Tavildara show that tensions are growing between militants and the Government of Tajikistan. While the Russian media continues to speculate about the return of extremists to Central Asia, the known extremist leaders have never left Tajikistan, Ataev added. The world financial crisis also has worsened the situation for many in Tajikistan and Iran.

Key Areas for Further Bilateral Cooperation

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17. (C) The CSIS representatives also asked what else the United States can do to improve the bilateral relationship. Ataev initially highlighted further military-technical assistance as a priority area, but then stressed that cooperation on trade and economic issues would be the most important area for engagement. Local purchase of materials would be a good start that could yield cooperation in other areas. Ataev noted, for example, that Uzbekistan would be very interested in energy cooperation with the United States. Ataev described South Korea's active involvement in Uzbekistan's Free Industrial Economic Zone (FIEZ) project in Navoi, noting that this would be not only an air hub, but also a terminus for Afghanistan, and that investors in the FIEZ would benefit from significant privileges.

"No" to Lethal Transit of Materials

18. (C) Lastly, CSIS asked whether Uzbekistan would be interested in assisting the United States with the transit of lethal materials across its borders in support of operations in Afghanistan. Ataev and Rakhmankulov noted that Russia had tried to make Uzbekistan sign its transit agreement with the United States under the auspices of the CSTO, but Uzbekistan had refused. They demurred on lethal transit cooperation, with Ataev noting that this is a complicated issue and that he would not say exactly why Uzbekistan will not permit this. Nevertheless, he alluded to terrorist attacks against non-lethal shipments in Kunduz, and implied that lethal transit across Uzbekistan's territory would encourage similar terrorist attacks. Countries far from Afghanistan do not face the same risks that Uzbekistan does, he continued. Uzbekistan warned the world long before 9/11 and was not heard, and it faced the Taliban alone for some time with no help from anyone. "We understand the seriousness of the situation, we are thankful that U.S. soldiers are fighting for our interests, and we are doing our best to provide whatever support we can," Ataev said. Uzbekistan remains worried about the possibility of a Taliban victory in Afghanistan, as well as the likelihood that Afghanistan would not forget or forgive Uzbekistan for any role in lethal transit assistance in such a scenario. (Comment: The GOU's refusal to allow air shipments to Afghanistan may reflect similar concerns about repercussions from the Taliban that could follow down the road if Uzbekistan permits highly-visible air shipments. End

comment.) Uzbekistan will continue to do what it can, assisting Afghanistan with electricity, schools, and roads, he concluded.

¶9. (C) Rakhmankulov explicitly warned that lethal transit could make Uzbekistan a target for terrorist attacks, which would play into Russia's hands. He raised the Strategic Partnership Agreement that the U.S. and Uzbekistan signed in 2002, and said that if the U.S. is truly interested in achieving peace and stability in Uzbekistan, then it must understand that Uzbekistan cannot be involved in lethal transit assistance. Charge made it clear that this question was raised by the guests as a matter of academic curiosity, and was in no way a proposal or even an inquiry by the USG.

Meeting with Norov

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¶10. (C) The CSIS representatives also met with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on July 27. Many of Norov's remarks resembled those of Ataev and Rakhmankulov, with Norov criticizing Russia at length. "We do not exclude" that Russia may have encouraged the recent violence in Andijon, Norov said. He accused Russia of trying to promote fear of narcotics and terrorism in Central Asia to reinforce the region's dependence on Russia. Norov was upset by perceived Russian hypocrisy on water issues as well as the CSTO's Rapid Reaction Forces. Russia could use the RRF in parts of the former Soviet Union in much the same way that it used its peacekeeping forces in Georgia, he asserted. He had nothing negative to say about either Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan, instead noting that Tashkent is trying to improve relations with Dushanbe and Bishkek.

Comment:

¶11. (C) These discussions gave us a fascinating glimpse into Uzbekistan's world view. It is notable that the Government of Uzbekistan granted such high-level meetings to representatives from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank that is not part of the U.S. government. Perhaps the GOU is mirror imaging, assuming that CSIS is directly connected to senior members of the USG in much the same way that Uzbekistan's so-called think tanks are subordinate to elites in the GOU (reftel A). Another possibility is that the GOU is hoping that CSIS will widely publicize Uzbekistan's displeasure with Russian activities, thus sending Moscow a signal. The GOU's comments certainly underscore its continuing distrust of Russian intentions, though their remarks also may reflect in part a desire to tell us what they think we want to hear, per the GOU's perception that Central Asia is a chessboard across which the world's major powers vie for influence.

¶12. (C) Interestingly, Ataev and Rakhmankulov spoke for approximately the same length of time over the course of the meeting, with Ataev deferring to Rakhmankulov from time to time on selected issues. This contrasts sharply with recent meetings chaired by Ataev at which Foreign Minister Norov and Defense Minister Berdiev sat silently by his side. Also interesting was Ataev's relatively animated behavior, which contrasts with the generally expressionless poker faces of many of our contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¶13. (C) We will report the results of the CSIS representatives' subsequent meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, Ministry of Defense, GOU "think tanks," and other parts of the GOU septel.
BUTCHER